

Chess Match No. 5
By Jocelyn Clarke

Adapted from the words of John Cage

(HE walks on stage and HE looks out at the audience. HE smiles, and maybe even salutes them. HE turns on the radio – the sound of numbers being spoken, a Cold War numbers station broadcast in Spanish. HE pours coffee grains into the coffee maker and switches it on. HE puts bread in the toaster, and turns it on.)

(HE turns out to the audience.)

HE: What am I doing? (laughs) What am I doing? (laughs) If I'm in the business of making something, then I just go on making it. And if I'm finished then I go do something else.

It seems to me that we are all moving in many directions at the present time and each one who is conscientious must answer for himself why he does what he does.

(Pause)

HE: The relationship between the work that has to do with the eyes and the work that has to do with the ears is naturally not the same because the eye isn't an ear. And the eye, for instance, is used to looking at the world and so sees the horizon and is concerned largely with horizontals. Whereas the ear is interested in time and the succession of events, and so is interested in the vertical.

(HE looks around at the stage. He goes to the radio and turns to the dial – a weather forecast for shipping.)

HE: The question that this brings to me now is: What's the nature of furniture? Here we have a number of chairs, but this is not where I live, really. I wouldn't have those chairs at home (laughs).

Nothing has changed but now our eyes and ears are ready to hear and see. Be quiet and listen! Beauty is simply as Wittgenstein has said, it clicks for us.

(Suddenly the toaster pops up. HE goes to the toaster and looks at the popped toast. HE looks at the bubbling coffee machine. Listens to the weather forecast on the radio. The sound of traffic in the street.)

(LONG PAUSE)

(HE looks at the audience.)

HE: What interests me far more than anything that happens is the fact of how it would be if nothing was happening.

(HE removes the toast and places it on the plate. Sounds of traffic and the radio.)

HE: Now, I want the things that happen to not erase the spirit that was already there without anything happening.

(HE switches off the radio.)

HE: Now, this thing that I mean when I say “not anything happening” is what I call silence; that is to say, a state of affairs free of intention, because we always have sounds.

(HE looks at the coffee machine, pours a cup of coffee and tastes it.)

HE: Therefore we don't have any silence available in the world: we're in a world of sounds.

(The streets sounds suddenly stop. All that is left is “silence”).

HE: We call it silence when we don't feel a direct connection with the intentions that produce the sounds. We say it's quiet when, due to our non-intention, there don't seem to us to be many sounds. When there seem to us to be many, we say it's noisy. But there is no real essential difference between a noisy silence and a quiet silence.

(VERY LONG PAUSE as HE listens to the sound in the theatre.)

HE: While we are listening to a piece of music or looking at a painting, inevitably things outside intrude – shadows or lights on a painting, sounds of people coughing or cars in the street coming into a piece of music to which we may be listening. If we see life as opposed to art, then we will find those shadows or ambient sounds interruptions. But if we engage in self-alteration, we will see them not as interruptions but as enrichments.

(The door opens suddenly, street sounds pour in as SHE enters.)

SHE: Presumably, what you have to do is create a situation in which everything is attended to.

HE: True. So I wouldn't say that we are interested in destroying the barrier between art and life or even blurring it. I would say that we are interested in observing that there is no barrier between the two.

(SHE takes a slice of HE's toast and eats it. HE pours a second cup of coffee and hands it to SHE. SHE opens her bag and takes out a chess set. They place it on the table and begin setting the pieces on the board – all while eating toast, drinking coffee, and speaking the below dialogue.)

SHE: Just the other day I went to the dentist. Over the radio they said it was the hottest day of the year. However, I was wearing a jacket, because going to a doctor

has always struck me as a somewhat formal occasion. In the midst of his work, Dr. Heyman stopped and said, "Why don't you take your jacket off?" I said, "I have a hole in my shirt and that's why I have my jacket on." He said, "Well, I have a hole in my sock, and, if you like, I'll take my shoes off."

HE: 35

(They both laugh. SHE looks out at the audience a moment)

SHE: You've got a large audience that could have a wonderful experience (*laughs*), which could possibly benefit them - could possibly be useful to them - by helping them to be more at home in the kind of sound space they have to inhabit every day.

HE: I love the way you use this word useful. I use it frequently in different ways. I would use it even in connection with changing one's mind – useful to change one's mind.

SHE: When we discussed doing these conversations, you said that they could be useful to you in talking about what you were doing now, because you had questions about what it actually was that you were doing.

HE: You can see how I'm in a state of not thinking and not feeling. Not doing any of the things that a person is said to be able to do.

SHE: And do you mean this generally because of the rush of your life?

HE: No, just the nature of the work.

(SHE removes a chess clock from her bag and places it on the table. HE pushes the button and listens to the ticking of the timer.)

SHE: Do you feel that every sound in the world is music?

HE: I do. I've made a point of enjoying the sound of the environment. The sweetest music is the sound of what happens.

SHE: How deeply perceptive, yet simple.

HE: Yes, and it's my experience. I listen to the sound of the environment, whether it comes from the conveniences in the house or from the traffic outside.

SHE: Do you find new surprises in those sounds every day?

HE: Yes.

SHE: Is that really what life is – the opportunity to hear all of these things?

HE: I think life, when we have it, is the paying of attention. Some people pay attention with their eyes and some pay attention with their ears. I enjoy paying attention with both my eyes and my ears, and I think that as a result my work has a theatrical quality – or character is a better word – because theater is the use of both eyes and ears.

(They both look out at the audience for a moment.)

SHE: You integrate the sounds of people coughing with the sounds of your music ...

HE: That is, what others call “silence.” I can exchange the sounds and silences. Everything depends on the circumstances and our intentions.

SHE: So you are asking that people relax their attention.

YOU: Information can be found anywhere. We can be in the presence of information without receiving it.

SHE: Then we should open ourselves up to all the information we don’t receive.

HE: It’s a little like noise compared to musical sounds: the more we discover that the noises of the outside world are musical, the more music there is.

SHE: Do you prefer city sounds or country sounds? City sights or country sights?

HE: Well, another way to put it would be: Are you in the city or are you in the country? (*laughs*)

SHE: Are you pleased that music is going in so many different directions?

HE: Oh yes, yes, very much so!

SHE: At what point does it become too much for people to comprehend?

HE: I don’t think that it’s a question of comprehension. It’s a question of experience, and the experience is available more and more to more people. That is to say, people’s ears are more flexible than they were, and it’s largely because of the great variety of musics.

SHE: Happy new ears!

HE: That’s right!

SHE: Do you feel that the state of the world is essentially complex or simple?

HE: Complex.

SHE: Can it be simplified?

HE: I don't think it can be simplified unless someone sets out to control it, and I wouldn't want to live in that kind of world. Would you?

(THEY both sit at the table. SHE holds out both her fists, each with a pawn hidden. HE taps one of her closed fists and SHE open it to reveal a black or white pawn – the choice can vary from performance to performance. They turn the board whichever colour HE chooses but SHE makes the first move on the chess board.)

SHE: You often say that the principle you operate by in composing is to not make choices, but to ask questions.

HE: Both choice and asking questions. Yes, I think that's probably true.

(SHE moves a piece and hits the clock.)

(HE moves a piece and hits the clock. SHE moves and hits the clock)

SHE: Your work, it seems to me, is inevitably, always an intersection of chance and decisions, choices that you are making.

(HE moves a piece and hits the clock.)

HE: Yes. Well these things do go through my head. And my tendency is that we won't know what the actual doing is until I do it.

(SHE moves a piece and hits the clock.)

HE: Satie said experience is a form of paralysis, and then to show how he would respond, himself, he said, show me something new and I will begin all over again. And he said that toward the end of his life.

SHE:
And did he find something new?

HE: Oh yes, constantly (laughs).

SHE:
So, he was constantly beginning all over again.

HE: Yes, yes. We must begin constantly from zero. Mmmm ... well ... Oh well, as they say, until everything collapses, there's room for hope.

SHE: It occurs to me that the reason why form no longer has to be one of your preoccupations is because now you discover it along the way.

HE: Exactly. Through chance.

SHE: Yes, you don't have to make a continuity, artificially.

YOU: I can observe it. I just observe it. I'm a tourist.

(HE moves a piece and hits the clock.)

SHE: It's interesting to me that your sense of the rules of the game, which you want to observe –

(SHE moves a piece and hits the clock. HE gets up and pours himself a cup of coffee. He puts on another slice of toast. HE offers SHE some more coffee. All the while, the chess timer has been slowing down and getting louder.)

(HE sits down, and sips from his coffee. HE moves a piece and hits the clock. The ticking stops suddenly. HE and SHE look at the audience and salute it with their coffee mugs.)

HE: The time will come when it could get better.

SHE: Um hmm.

HE: Conceivably.

SHE: Conceivably.

HE: Or we could have the truth told – that it will never get better! (laughter)

SHE: Thank goodness! (laughter)

HE: And then we'll notice how observant we are.

SHE: Well, it might be noticed even more.

HE: Well, but the situation is so amazing. There are so many things to notice. Then you'd wonder, Why do they have this performance with nothing happening? (laughter) Oh! So, I must say I very clearly prefer not knowing.

SHE:

What's the advantage of not knowing what you are doing?

HE: It cheers up the knowing. Otherwise, knowing will be very self conscious and frequently guilty.

SHE: Not knowing is of course an enviable position.

HE: Yes.

SHE: It properly should be the position of the audience. It's enviable because one can simply relax and accept.

HE: And enjoy what happens.

(SHE begins to hum. HE gets a brush and pan, and begins tidying up around the chess board.)

SHE (to the audience): As we go along, (who knows?) an idea may occur in this talk. I have no idea if one will or not. If one does, let it. Regard it as something seen momentarily, as though from a window while travelling.

SHE (to HE): In Zen they say: If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, try it for eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and so on. Eventually one discovers that it's not boring at all but very interesting.

HE: 75

(SHE hums for a while as HE brushes the floor.)

SHE: A mother and son visited the Seattle Art Museum. Several rooms were devoted to the work of Morris Graves. When they came to one in which all of the paintings were black, the mother, placing a hand across her son's eyes, said, "Come, dear, mother doesn't want you to see these things."

(HE stops brushing.)

HE: 133.

(SHE hums for a while as HE brushes the floor.)

SHE: Several men, three as a matter of fact, were out walking one day, and as they were walking along and talking, one of them noticed another man standing on a hill ahead of them. He turned to his friends and said, "Why do you think that man is standing up there on that hill?" One said, "He must be up there because it's cooler there and he is enjoying the breeze." He turned to another and repeated his question, "Why do you think that man is standing up there on that hill?" The second said, "Since the hill is elevated above the rest of the land, he must be up there in order to see something in the distance." And the third said, "He must have lost his

friend and that is why he is standing there alone on that hill." After some time walking along, the men came up the hill and the one who had been standing there was still there: standing there. They asked him to say which one was right concerning his reason for standing where he was standing. "What reason do you have for my standing here?" he asked. We have three," they answered." "First you are standing up here because it's cooler there and you are enjoying the breeze. Second, since the hill is elevated above the rest of the land, you are up here in order to see something in the distance. Third, you have lost your friend and that is why you are standing here alone on this hill. We have walked this way; we never meant to climb this hill; now we want an answer: which one of us is right?" The man answered, "I just stand."

HE: 34

(SHE hums for a while as HE put away the brush and pan.)

SHE: You have a wonderful serenity....

HE: No, but...I think I have just as much trouble as everyone else!

SHE: I was going to say that your serenity enables people to accept what you're doing...

HE: You think I don't have any problems?

SHE: I wasn't being frivolous-

HE: Well, I know-

SHE: I'm trying to understand-

HE: And I'm trying to keep it misunderstood! (laughs)

(SHE starts to whistle – something jaunty and up tempo. HE gets up and walks to the edge of the stage.)

HE: I can't tell anybody how to listen or how to look. I certainly can't tell them what to remember, particularly when I don't want to remember anything myself. If I look at a Coca Cola bottle, and then look at another Coca Cola bottle, I want to forget the first Coca Cola bottle in order to see the second Coca Cola bottle as being original. And it is original because it is in a different position in space and time and light is shining on it differently so that no two Coca Cola bottles are the same.

(SHE walks over and turns on the radio – numbers station. She turns the dial – a weather forecast for shipping. She turns the dial again - music, something old, mid-tempo. HE smiles at SHE and they dance. This is one of three similar dances – at

different tempi, with different moods - to be chosen from the radio cue. They stop dancing.)

HE: This is an odd way to have a conversation.

SHE: Two people have different feelings and that is what allows them to converse.

HE: It is difference that makes dialogue possible.

SHE: Yes.

HE: And, sometimes, when I speak, I give the impression that I am against feelings. But what I am against is the imposition of feelings.

SHE: Shall we play a game of chess?

(THEY sit, reset the chessboard and start to play a real game – in silence, punctuated by the chess clock they hit. After a while the telephone rings.)

HE: Do you think I should turn the telephone off? I can do that.

SHE: Let's see how it ...

(The telephone stops ringing.)

HE: I always think if we can keep it without disturbing us too much ... I prefer the idea that we keep open to the ... to the other ...

SHE: I know. I'm not disturbed by it, if you're not.

HE: So, then it's O.K.

(They play on – the sounds of traffic can be heard.)

SHE: Wouldn't you say that what we are dependent upon, that we call reality, and what we don't like we consider an intrusion in our life. Consequently I feel that what's happening is that we are continually being intruded upon.

HE: That would make us very unhappy.

SHE: Or we surrender to it and call it culture.

HE: Call it culture?

SHE: Or whatever.

HE: Give me an example. What would be an intrusion on your life that you would call culture?

SHE: This weekend I was on the beach and on the beach these days there are transistor radios blaring...

HE: Yes.

SHE: ... all over.

HE: And you did not like it?

SHE: Not particularly. I adjusted to it.

HE: How?

SHE: Well, I thought of the sun and the sea as a lesser evil.

HE: You know how I adjusted to that problem of the radio in the environment is that primitive people adjusted to the animals which frightened them and which probably were intrusions.

SHE: They drew pictures of them on their caves.

HE: And so I simply made a piece using radios. Now, whenever I hear radios, even a single one, I think that they are all just playing my piece. And I listen to it with pleasure.

SHE: With pleasure?

HE: By pleasure I mean I notice what happens, I can attend to it, rather than surrender. I can rather pay attention and become interested in what superimposes what. What happens at the same time together with what happens before and what happens after?

SHE: But I can't think.

HE: This brings up the remark of Satie's that what we need is a music that will not interrupt the noises of the environment. We might then need thoughts that would not impose upon the transistor radio.

SHE: This is a coin that has two sides. Say you think of your thoughts as the reality and the environment is an intrusion and so that Satie quote just takes that card and turns it over and says that the reality is the environment and what you want to do in it is an intrusion.

HE: And finally, the work of an artist is it not an incisive intrusion? Because it didn't exist until the artist does it.

SHE: Check.

(HE looks at the board. And makes a move.)

SHE: You integrate the sounds of people coughing with the sounds of your music ...

HE: That is, what others call 'silence.' I can exchange the sounds and the silences.

SHE: And in so doing, you upset music! (beat) Check!

(HE looks at the board. And makes a move.)

HE: 'Music', as you put it, is only a word.

SHE: Would you say that what people continue to call 'silence,' by force of habit, belongs in reality to another domain? Or does silence indeed arise from this same domain: music?

HE: It's already sound, and it's sound all over again. Our noise. It becomes sound at that moment.

SHE: If silence does not exist, no one can possess it. If sound and silence are at once opposites and the same, can anyone possess sounds? Is that indeed what you said to yourself?

HE: Yes, sound no longer comprises an obstacle to silence; silence is no longer a screen with regard to sound. (beat) Check!

(SHE looks at the board. Makes a move.)

(SILENCE.)

SHE: In the beginning you were concerned with expressing something?

HE: Yes, I thought that music should 'communicate.'

SHE: How did you get from there to interchange silence and sound?

HE: If you look at a blank sheet of paper you can compare it to silence. From the slightest spot or mark, from the slightest hold, from the smallest defect or from the smallest smudge, you know there is no silence.

(Street sounds ceases suddenly.)

SHE: Check mate.

(The chess match ends. HE gets up and makes some coffee – the sound of the coffee machine. He turns on the radio, and turns the dial – a baseball game, religious music, then the numbers station – now counting in Russian. THEY both listen for a while.)

SHE: You probably know the one about the two monks, but I'll tell it anyway. They were walking along one day when they came to a stream where a young lady was waiting, hoping that someone would help her across. Without hesitating, one of the monks picked her up and carried her across, putting her down safely on the other side. The two monks continued walking along, and after some time, the second one, unable to restrain himself, said to the first, "You know we're not allowed to touch women. Why did you carry that woman across the stream?" The first monk replied, "Put her down. I did two hours ago."

HE: TWO. Our notion of male and female is an oversimplification of an actually complex human state.

(HE hands SHE a cup of coffee. They sip their coffees – sounds of traffic.)

HE: The traditional reason for making a piece of music in India: "to quiet the mind thus making it susceptible to divine influences."

SHE: Now the question arises: What is a quiet mind? Then the second question arises: What are divine influences?

HE: A sober and quiet mind is one in which the ego does not obstruct the fluency of the things that come into our senses and up through our dreams. Our business in living is to become fluent with the life we are living, and art can help this.

SHE: Music is a means of rapid transportation to life everlasting.

HE: To life. Period.

(SHE begins to set up the chess board again.)

HE: I've thought of music as a means of changing the mind. Of course, my proper concern first of all has been with changing my own mind. I saw art not as something that consisted of a communication from the artist to an audience but rather as an activity of sounds in which the artist found a way to let the sounds be themselves. And in their being themselves to open the minds of the people who make them or listened to other possibilities than they had previously considered. To widen their experience, particularly to undermine the making of value judgments.

SHE: Doesn't this make everyone a musician?

HE: I think it comes about through placing the center everywhere, in all the people whether they're composing or listening, and furthermore placing the center too in the sounds themselves. So there is then an interpenetration of unlimited centers.

SHE: The function of music is to change the mind so that it does become open to experience, which inevitably is interesting.

SHE: I was thinking about your silent pieces. Aren't they superfluous, since the noises of nature already exist?

HE: The aspect of nature with which we are the most familiar – and this familiarity is almost painful – is that we, as a human species, have endangered nature. We have acted against it, we have rebelled against its existence.

SHE: So, our concern today must be to reconstitute it for what it is.

HE: And nature is not a separation of water from air, or of the sky from the earth, etc., but a "working-together," or a "playing together" of those elements. That is what we call ecology. Music, as I conceive it, is ecological.

SHE: You could go further and say that it IS ecology.

(SHE laughs.)

SHE: Your attitude is always one of acceptance.

HE: I never try to refuse anything.

SHE: What you refuse to do is to be exclusive, that is to want something.

HE: I can want something, but only if I find myself in a set of circumstances where nothing I decide seems to me to concern others.

SHE: Can you be more specific?

HE: When I eat in a restaurant, I can choose chicken instead of steak without really bothering anyone.

(THEY both laugh.)

SHE: What is this all about?

HE: My intention is to let things be themselves. Now, what does that mean, letting things be themselves or not approaching them except as they are? I prefer to see

things as they are, and to see what good they contain. I like to think that each thing has not only its own life but also its center, and that this center is always the very center of the Universe.

SHE: So it's also an invitation to plurality or multiplicity. Your experience is one thing, mine is different. Things are spontaneously what they are.

HE: That's a splendid idea! Yes, it's very beautiful. We're surrounded by all this multiplicity ... And our attention, or our appetite, is going to increase. We will become more and more capable of experiencing things, of having our own experiences.

SHE: Do you believe your self-creation came about as a result of your relation to your work?

HE: It reminds me of what Thoreau said, and I feel so too. "It's not important what form the sculptor gives the stone. It's important what sculpting does to the sculptor." The works signed "John Cage" don't belong to their author.

SHE: They are just as much what you make of them as what I make of them, because you are there and I am here.

HE: I agree completely. We're not communicating, but we are conversing.

(HE picks up the cups and plates and begins tidying. SHE starts setting up the chess board. SHE holds out her hands with two pawns hidden.

HE: Marcel Duchamp said it was the function of the observer, or the listener, to complete the work of art.

(He chooses one, they turn the boards and start to play a game – in silence, punctuated by the chess clock they hit. After a while the telephone rings.)

HE: Art has a way – whether it's good or bad – of changing how we see the world. Oskar Wilde expressed that in one of his bon mots – "Nature imitates art." So you have the experience frequently after going to a gallery of coming out and finding that everything you see is seen in those terms, hmmm? Where you were, rather than where you are. So, if in the art you were in a very special place, then the world must be transformed into that kind of specialness, hmm? Whereas, if it transfers you – as Duchamp did for me – to something ordinary then it's not as though it were a case of the "special," but it enlarges the spiritual experience to include many, many things ... without ... without giving them some kind of "dressed up" feeling, hmmm?

SHE: In the years that Duchamp was answering questions about his art by saying "I breathe," or "I like breathing better than working," and conspicuously playing chess ... not visibly doing art – (phone rings)

HE: Isn't that phone terrible? Maybe we should stop it.

(The phone ringing begins to stretch and then slow down.

HE: The work of Duchamp is so shocking in the context of the museum that it's effective in the context of life. You can go to an exhibition of Duchamp and you can suspect that you're not seeing art. You wonder, well, what is this?

(The phone cuts out suddenly in the middle of a distorted ring.)

HE: I can't get along without Duchamp! (*laughter*) I literally believe that Duchamp made it possible for us to live as we do.

SHE: I like to think of you and Marcel Duchamp playing chess together.

HE: Well, we actually didn't play much.

SHE: You didn't play?

HE: No. No. I played with Teeny Duchamp, his wife. And he would criticize our game. And he said to me once, he said, "Don't you ever want to win?" (*laughs*)

SHE: Have you ever thought that you were going crazy?

HE: The feeling is not familiar to me.

SHE: Have you ever had any big disappointment? What has been your biggest disappointment?

HE: I don't think it's an interesting question, forgive me.

SHE: If you could speak to anyone of the past, whom would you like to talk with?

HE: Thoreau would, of course be one ... James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Eric Satie. If we went back further, I wouldn't mind meeting Mozart.

SHE: Why Mozart?

HE: I think he was a great musician. If you examine any page of Mozart, you're apt to discover not one idea but many. I think in the case of Mozart there is an implicit tendency toward multiplicity. That tendency interests me more than the tendency toward unity. It seems to me to be more characteristic of nature. If I look at a tree, a single tree, and start looking at the leaves, all, admittedly, have the same general structure. If I look at it carefully, I notice that no two leaves are identical. Then I

begin with that attention to differences to enjoy every glance at the tree, because everything I see is something I haven't memorized.

SHE: What do you feel is the importance of the music of the past?

HE: What do you mean?

SHE: I mean the works of Beethoven, Haydn and others.

HE: The past is not a fact. The past is simply a big field that had a great deal of activity in it. I asked a historian once, "How do you write history?" and he said, "Oh, you have to invent it." Well, the way we invent history is by doing what we do; and the more we do, the more we looking to the past to see if there is anything that is like what we are doing. If there is, we get interested; and if there isn't, we don't.

SHE: Before studying Zen, men are men and mountains are mountains. While studying Zen, things become confused. After studying Zen, men are men and mountains are mountains.

HE: What's the difference between before and after?

SHE: No difference, only the feet are a little bit off the ground.

(THEY both laugh. The sound of a fire alarm beeping. Neither appear to notice it as they continue their dialogue.)

HE: The sound experience that I prefer to all others is the experience of silence. And the silence almost everywhere in the world now is traffic.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: If you listen to Beethoven or to Mozart, you see that they are always the same. But if you listen to traffic, you see that it is always different.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: When I hear traffic I don't have the feeling that anyone is talking, I have the feeling that sound is acting, and I love the activity of sound.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: What it does is it gets longer and quieter and it gets higher and lower and it gets longer and shorter.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: It does all those things that I am completely satisfied with. I don't need sound to talk to me.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: We don't see much difference between time and space. We don't know where one begins and the other starts.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: Most of the arts we think of being in time and most of the arts we see as being in space.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: People expect listening to be more than listening. And so sometimes they speak of "inner listening," or "the meaning of sound."

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: When I talk about music I am talking about sound that doesn't mean anything – that's not inner, that is just outer.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: I love sounds, just as they are. I have no need for them to be anything more than what they are.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: I don't want it to be psychological, I do not want a sound to pretend that it's a bucket or that it's a president or that it's in love with another sound.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: I just want it to be a sound.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: I keep my mind alive and alert, or at least I try to.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: As a result, everything dissonant, I hear as consonant.

SHE: If anyone is sleepy, let him go to sleep.

HE: What I try to approach is the sound in itself, as it is.

SHE: Not as you would like it to be.

HE: Not as it's 'supposed' to be. (Beat) Check.

SHE: YOU are a perfectly 'concrete' musician.
(SHE moves a piece. He looks at the board and then moves a piece.)

HE: It would be just as valid to express musical ideas with lights ...Check!

(SHE moves a piece.)

SHE: Certain composers dream of doing that, some do it ...

HE: Or with apples! (beat) Check mate!

(SHE notices the fire alarm beeping.)

SHE: Is that the fire alarm?

HE: Yes. It is malfunctioning. It beeps for long periods and for short periods. Mostly at night.

SHE: How do you sleep with it beeping?

HE: I lie in bed, listen carefully to its pattern, and I work it into my thoughts and dreams. I sleep very well.

(The fire alarm stops beeping. Sounds of traffic begin to rise.)

HE: One evening when I was still living at Grand Street and Monroe, the artist Isamu Noguchi came to visit me. There was nothing in the room (no furniture, no paintings). The floor was covered, wall to wall, with cocoa matting. The windows had no curtains, no drapes. Isamu Noguchi said, "An old shoe would look beautiful in this room."

SHE: One. (pause as she listens to the traffic.) Do you like all the noise?

HE: I love it

SHE: What is your attitude towards random sounds?

HE: I just love them.

SHE: How would you define your task as a composer?

HE: If there are only a few ideas, it produces a kind of concentration, which is characteristic of human beings. Whereas, if there are many things, it produces a kind of chaos, which is characteristic of nature.

SHE: That's what you want?

HE: Yes. That's what we live in.

SHE: The fact that we live in it may mean that we don't want it.

HE: That's a very good statement. I'm taking for granted that we love dissonance.
(laughs)

SHE: We're among friends.

(SHE gets up and turns the dial on the radio – a news report of the day, a celebrity news item, then stops at music – slow tempo. HE gets up and they both dance rather formally.

SHE: You really see the world differently because of your experiences with art, one art or another that shows you connections other than you knew before it. You need it to tell you –

HE: To remind you –

SHE: To transform you. You notice different things than you had noticed before. Sometimes art seems to transform, seems to become something other than itself – then you need more of an environment –

HE: You need more for what?

SHE: More relationship. You begin to notice different kinds of relationships between all those things as they are mirrored in your daily experience. You notice them again. You recognize them. (pause) This leads to the relation of art to the enjoyment of life. Which is what must be its purpose!

HE: If not, then why?

SHE: Then we're in the wrong place. (laughter)

(They stop dancing. He begins to tidy up again. SHE resets the chess board.)

SHE: A crowded bus on the point of leaving Manchester for Stockport was found by its conductress to have one too many standees. She therefore asked, "Who was the last person to get on the bus?" No one said a word. Declaring that the bus would not leave until the extra passenger was put off, she went and fetched the driver, who also asked, "All right, who was the last person to get on the bus?" Again there was a public silence. So the two went to find an inspector. He asked, "Who was the last person to get on the bus?" No one spoke. He then announced that he would fetch a policeman. While the conductress, driver, and inspector were away looking for a policeman, a little man came up to the bus stop and asked, "Is this the bus to Stockport?" Hearing that it was, he got on. A few minutes later the three returned accompanied by a policeman. He asked, "What seems to be the trouble? Who was the last person to get on the bus?" The little man said, "I was." The policeman said, "All right, get off." All the people on the bus burst into laughter. The conductress, thinking they were laughing at her, burst into tears and said she refused to make the trip to Stockport. The inspector then arranged for another conductress to take over. She, seeing the little man standing at the bus stop, said, "What are you doing there?" He said, "I'm waiting to go to Stockport." She said, "Well this is the bus to Stockport. Are you getting on or not?"

HE: 135.

(HE laughs)

HE: Do you feel that the state of the world is essentially complex or simple?

SHE: Complex

HE: Can it be simplified?

SHE: I don't think it can be simplified unless someone sets out to control it, and I wouldn't want to live in that kind of world. Would you?

(HE holds out his two hands, a pawn hidden in each. SHE chooses one, and they turn the board to play.)

SHE: I'm on the side of keeping things mysterious, and I have never enjoyed understanding things. If I understand something, I have no further use for it. I like art to remain mysterious. If I understand something I can put it on a shelf and leave it there. In the past I thought it had to do with the feeling in Europe of a tradition or the history, whereas we here in America have very little sense of history. We're so to speak tourist in our own country, which really belongs to the Indians.

HE: So what's the question?

SHE: Well, do artists change the grammar of the way we are together?

HE: Yes, isn't that beautiful? (pause) We don't know. But we can try.

SHE: Most people are afraid of anarchy, aren't they?

HE: Any training in art is at least a partial training in anarchy! (laughs) People learn not to follow the rules from outside but from inside.

ME: That in itself is a subversive thought.

HE: I have some others too! (laughs) Each one of us must be subversive. All you have to do is realize that is to pick up a daily newspaper.

SHE: What I want is a practical and practicable anarchy.

HE: What do you mean by that?

SHE: An impracticable anarchy is one which provokes the intervention of the police.

HE: Ordinarily one thought that the function of the artist was to express himself, and therefore he had to set up particular relationships. I think this whole question of art is one of changing our minds and that the function of the artist is not self-expression but rather self-alteration. The thing being altered is not his hand or his eyes but his mind. And art that changes our minds can give us examples of how society might change.

SHE: That's what you want?

HE: Well, I needn't need I, point out intolerable things going on nowadays? They're too evident. We know them without even mentioning them. Our heads are full of them. You must make the world so that these things don't take place- this divisiveness of intention, purpose, and competition in the world between nations. The wars, the dog-eat-dog, the piggishness, are utterly intolerable. Is that not true?

SHE: Very true. But how does art help?

HE: I may be wrong but I think art's work is done. Art has done a very, very good job.

SHE: What job?

HE: To open people's eyes, to open people's ears. What better thing could have been done? We must turn our attention now I think to other things, and those things are social. Society.

SHE: When you say society, you don't mean an audience?

HE: Isn't it that way – relationships? I don't think we can speak about society as a whole. I think we have to speak about relationships with people. And at a point where we wouldn't speak of society. When we speak of society, as a crowd, or a concert audience, it doesn't have a meaning that's made up of ups and downs, hmmm? So it has no reality. It's something you don't remember. But relationships with friends or individual people ... isn't a fixed thing that you come to and keep. It's something which is not dependable. Even if you think it is, it isn't, hmmm? And it gets richer as it encounters obstacles and surmounts them.

SHE: Well it's forced into the activity of developing. That keeps it alive.

HE: What's involved is the people in the street changing their focus of attention, and we can't force them to change it, something else has to do that. Circumstances have to do that. And they will! Hmm?

SHE: Where does that last come from – “and they will”?

HE: You see, we may always get an impression that the masses are inert, or uninspired and so forth. But every now and then some of them will become inspired. And others who are not inspired will take their place. (pause) So ... there might be a continuing stupidity just as there's a continuing enlightenment? (laughs)

SHE: When Sri Ramakrishna was asked why, if God is good, is there evil in the world, he replied, “To thicken the plot.”

HE: The most powerful revolutionary force will derive from the most positive rather than any negative attitude.

(PHONE rings –this time the ringing is again distorted, with sometimes long and sometimes short rings)

HE: I'm actually thinking that if one were going to revise the Ten Commandments you know, now, to suit the present social life, and even individual life, that one of them would be “Thou Shalt Not Have an Answering Service” (laughs) and “Thou Shalt Not Have an Unlisted Telephone Number.” In fact, “Thou Shalt Have a Telephone and Thou Shall Answer It” (laughs).

SHE: Many people tell me, “How do I reach John Cage?” And I say, “Just pick up the telephone.”

(THEY listen to the phone.)

SHE: Well, in a sense maybe what the telephone does, when it rings, it rings, it takes us away from our self and I think our self, or the whole concept of self, doesn't work. I mean, for whom the telephone rings.

HE: It rings for me, obviously, unless it's a wrong number.

SHE: And it takes me out of this other dream. That's become my attitude.

HE: The possibility of this interruption waking up, or altering it, just that that could be seen not as an interruption or a threat or a danger or anything, but as something like, say, inspiration – a little fresh air coming in (both laugh).

SHE: With the ringing.

HE: With the ringing, yes.

SHE: Well, I think that's the point, in a sense, I think it becomes clearer. I must admit that as we're talking, I know exactly what we ...

HE: What we were talking about.

SHE: Not only what we were talking about, but what we're talking about now. But I think it's really becoming clearer for me that it's just impossible any longer to escape from these interruptions.

HE: Right.

SHE: In fact, it almost becomes as if "we our self" then is the interruption.

HE: Right. And we're very good at that.

SHE: And we're very good at that.

HE: Better than the telephone rings (laughs).

SHE: Better! Better! Much better!

HE: Because we can do that without ringing (laughs).

SHE: Pick up the telephone.

(Phone continues ringing, increasingly distorted.)

SHE: Are you going to get the phone?

HE: I guess I am.

(He moves to answer it.)

HE: Very often we get interrupted, thinking something's burning, or the phone rings, or something else happens, and when we come back we start not at the right point, hmmm?

(As he reaches for the handset, the ringing stops.)

HE: Sometimes people ask me, what is the goal of technology. I say we really need a technology that will be so excellent that when we have it we won't even know it's there. And I see this occurring in all fields now.

(SUDDENLY SHE begins to rock on her chair, adjusting her body as if it were breaking beneath her.

HE: The proper goal – I don't like the word goal but let's use it – the proper goal of each activity is its obviation. Wouldn't this be a lovely goal now, for politics, for economics?

SHE: For music?...I have a funny feeling that this chair –

HE: Oh, yes, it's coming apart! Do you want to shift chairs? It wouldn't be good if you fell out of the chair.

SHE: No. Though it would be funny.

HE: You are marvelous!

SHE: Once I was visiting my Aunt Marge. She was doing her laundry. She turned to me and said, "You know? I love this machine much more than I do your Uncle Walter."

(THEY laugh.)

HE: 57. My deepest desire regarding contemporary music is to hear it all. Not successively, but all at once, at the same time. Everything together. But perhaps that is a perverse wish ... Who knows if we'll do it even when we have the necessary technology? That technology doesn't exist yet? Well, long live the technology to come!

SHE: O.K. Where are we now?

HE: Whether it will work or not, I cannot predict. I don't know what's going to happen.

SHE: It is the ultimate 'experimental' situation.

HE: Yes, no one can foretell what will happen. I don't know myself. This is an explosive situation.

SHE: Whatever happens surges forth everywhere at once. You can't live in just a partial way, but totally.

HE: You must rid yourself of all specialization.

SHE: Art, for example, is everywhere, so you don't have to get rid of it.

HE: Art goes in all directions, and you cannot even discern what the directions are as long as you haven't taken them yourself.

(THEY sit down at the chess board, together setting the pieces in place. HE holds out his hands, each with a pawn hidden. SHE chooses one, they adjust the board and begin playing a "real" game of chess. The game will last as long as it does.

(THEY do not talk during the game, instead playing silently. Around them is a score of sounds, all the sounds we have heard during the performance thus far. We are listening to a composition made by the estimable Darron West., called Chess Match No. 5 (no hashtag).)

(The chess match ends, whoever winning declaring "check mate" loudly.)

HE: Well, it's hard to tell if we are standing still or moving.

SHE: The thread of emptiness that runs through all of it.

HE: Yes, yes.

SHE: It's very interesting to me –

HE: Yes.

SHE: That the thread of emptiness runs –

HE: Runs through everything.

SHE: Through everything.

HE: Everything, yes.

SHE: All of these things always have to be –

HE: Empty –

SHE: On the edge of –

HE: Emptiness –

SHE: Emptiness. And have to be able to contain emptiness.

HE: Yes. And will defy, or bring together, the opposites. It's very important. (pause)

SHE: Pushing against that edge then always has to involve difference ... uncertainty.

HE: Yes, I think so, yes.

SHE: Emptiness is important. Emptiness is of the essence.

HE: Emptiness as receptivity.

SHE: Yes.

HE: I think our questions are stupid and corny. Well, my answers are too, so it makes no difference. We're just a group of stupid people talking nonsense. I feel very stupid now. I feel myself, in the present moment, of just not knowing what to do at all; and I hate to do what I have done. And yet I don't know what to do now.

SHE: We are full of contradictions.

(HE goes to the radio and turns it on. The Numbers Station. This time the numbers are in English. He begins to tidy up the space, putting away the bugs and switching off the coffee maker. She resets the pieces on the chessboard. He sweeps the floor. They do the actions ordinarily, as if tidying up at home. They finish their chores, and look around at the audience.)

SHE: Do you think things are getting better or worse?

HE: I don't know. It's an interesting question. I don't think if we answer it that we'll get where we're going.

SHE: I think things change, don't you?

HE: The situation of being constantly on the brink of change, exterior and interior, is what makes the question that has been asked difficult to answer. One never reaches a point of shapedness or finishedness. The situation is in constant unpredictable change.

SHE: Well, perhaps we should stop here...

YOU: I always start everything over again from zero.

SHE: To start again?

HE: To start fresh.

HE: Do you like here?

(SHE looks around.)

SHE: Yes. Yes.

(HE goes to the radio, turns the dial: a traffic report, an ad for health products, and then music. A foxtrot or the tango. Something exuberant and playful. They dance.)

SHE: This is an odd way to have a conversation.

ME: I'm still tempted, perhaps at the very end, to try out the principle "All answers are answers to all questions" by reshuffling some of the questions and answers and seeing what happens.

YOU: Right, very good. Do that. I like that very much.

ME: I thought you would. It's in the spirit of your spirit.

YOU: And it's a kind of truth too.

ME: Yes, a dislodging kind of truth.

HE: Yes, or I often use the word "useful" then.

SHE: Here are six answers:

1. That is a very good question. I should not want to spoil it with an answer.
2. My head wants to ache.
3. Had you heard Marya Fruend last April in Palermo singing Arnold Schoenberg's Pierrot Lunaire. I doubt whether you would ask that question.
4. According to the Farmers' Almanac, this is a false spring
5. Please repeat the question. And again. And again.
6. I have no more answers.

(HE claps his hands.)

HE: Oh that's wonderful! Hmm?

(SHE approaches the edge of the stage. The lights come on in the house.)

SHE: The question is what is it that you're doing. If while you're looking, you listen, then you could say it was musical theater, no? The idea of musical theater, or opera, is when you both see and hear. But if you're so concentrated that you look without hearing, which I think some people do, then it's seeing. Or, conversely, if you close your eyes, as so many people do at concerts, then it's music. (laughs)

HE: Ah, so all we have to do is close our eyes, and the concert begins!

SHE: I think one of the things that has happened is that it's become clear that we can be, not just with our minds, but with our whole being, responsive to sound, and that sound doesn't have to be the communication of some deep thought.

HE: They can be just a sound.

SHE: Now that sound could go in one ear and out the other, or it could go in one ear, permeate the being, transform the being, and then perhaps go out, letting the next one in (they both laugh).

HE: And then whether or not an idea developed ...

SHE: You know, the hardest thing in the world, of course is to have a head without any ideas in it.

HE: Boredom is not so bad and not really boring, you know.

SHE: This is something I've known all along from Zen Buddhism. You know that story. If something's boring, after two minutes, try it for four, after four, try it for eight, et cetera. You eventually find it isn't boring.

HE: People are constantly complaining. Almost everyday somebody tells me that things are boring.

SHE: Things aren't boring. It's just that the people manage somehow with these things that they say are boring, not to get with them. Once they get with them, then boredom's the last thing that enters their minds. However, even while it's boring, I would say that it's something to be valued and experienced.

HE: The only one who can speak of boredom is the one who isn't really paying attention to what is happening.

SHE: We read – even into two specks of dust – we read a relationship of some kind. I think when you look at a movie your mind runs to plot, hmmm? That something's happening.

HE: Would it make a difference to the viewer ...?

SHE: To know something about how things had been done?

HE: What I'm proposing, to myself and to other people, is what I often call the tourist attitude – that you act as though you've never been there before (laughs). So that you're not supposed to know anything about it, hmmm?

SHE: So we really – if you get down to brass tacks – we have never really been anywhere before! I mean even the most familiar places.

HE: I think the history of art is simply a history of getting rid of the ugly by entering into it, and using it. We're working with our minds. What we're trying to do is to get them open so that we don't see things as being ugly, or beautiful, but we see them just as they are.

SHE: Well, I didn't want to use these terms (HE laughs), but what I'm really getting at, and which I didn't feel that I would want to get at, was, where do we come in?

HE: Who do you mean?

SHE: The artist. Now I wouldn't be hurt if you tell me ...

HE: Where do we go out?

SHE: ...that it's all over. Where do we go ... no, that's better ... where do we go out?

HE: Well, let's see.

SHE: Where do we leave?

HE: Now, we don't want to say, "Where do we come in?" or, "Where do we go out?" Because we would like, I think not to leave, but to stay here, now that we're here.

SHE: I'm not ready to leave.

HE: Exactly. So the question is ...

SHE: It's like dying.

HE: The question is more, "How do we spend our time?"

SHE: That's excellent. That's quite good.

HE: Do I have to say over and over again what it seems to me I've said already? And I'm afraid the answer is "yes." What do you think?

ME: I imagine it's "yes."

HE: Yes.

(They sit down to play a chess game. SHE holds out her two hands closed, a pawn hidden in each. HE chooses one, they turn the board and look at one another.)

SHE: This time on the way to New Haven, it was a very hot and humid day. We stopped in Newtown at a place for some ice. There was a choice: raspberry, grape, lemon, orange, and pineapple. I took grape. It was refreshing. I asked the lady who served it whether she had made it. She said, "Yes." I said, "Is it fresh fruit?" She said, "It's not fresh, but it's fruit."

HE: 65. Let's imagine, just to make the conversation consistent, that the concert is in a room, and that one door from that room is open, and in the room upon which it opens, radio music is audible. Now, must that door be closed or may it be left open?

(SOUND of traffic which begins to rise during the following exchange.)

SHE: That's very interesting.

HE: That's the sort of thing I'm good for, don't you think?

SHE: The wind-up!

HE: No, that kind of ... I don't know.

SHE: No, but you have marvelous rejuvenating powers (both laugh).

HE: Well, now I have to bicycle .. oh, no, I don't.

SHE: We never went on this long.

HE: No, but that's good. Now ...

SHE: It was very interesting today. This was the first time ...

YOU: Oh, you were marvelous.

(SOUND of traffic climaxes as HE makes the first chess move. Lights snap out.)